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NEWSLETTER

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PLEASE RETURN

THINGS ARE CLICKING DOWN ON BLUEWATER CREEK

By Kit Walther
Statewide 208 Coordinator

Bluewater Creek, in Carbon County southwest of Billings, isn't blue anymore -- at least in its lower segment. The last four miles of the Bluewater cut deeply into its alluvial fan at the foot of the Pryor Mountains where the creek meets the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone. The Bluewater -- better it were named the Graywater at this point -- contributes large quantities of sediment to the Clarks Fork and eats away prime agricultural land.

Like many streams, the problems on lower Bluewater are a product of poor land-management practices superimposed upon naturally erosive soils with a history of flooding. Poor irrigation management and ditch locations, overgrazing and channelization, and the floods and erosive soils have left lower Bluewater Creek with 20-foot vertical banks and a series of head cuts that have turned the clear water a clayey gray.

There is, however, hope for Bluewater Creek and its landowners. A "Bluewater Creek Water Quality Improvement Project" has been organized by a "task force" of people from the Carbon County Conservation District, the Beartooth RC&D and landowners living on the creek. With 208 funds, for project planning, the district hired a consultant to prepare a rehabilitation proposal for lower Bluewater Creek. The study, completed this fall, prescribed bank and gully stabilization and estimated the costs for the three drop structures that the study said were needed to slow down the water's velocity. The report -- along with a study funded by the Soil Conservation Service and the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service -- determined the measures and costs for improving irrigation management, consolidating irrigation ditches, and installing irrigation pipelines and fencing.

Knowing what was needed and the associated costs, the task force was able to develop a plan to solicit implementation dollars from various

The Statewide 208 Project is funded by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency under provision of Section 208, PL 92-500 for the purposes of water quality management in that portion of Montana exclusive of the three designated planning districts. Project Coordinator is Kit Walther; Public Participation Coordinator is Charles Wood; Montana Water Quality Bureau; telephone (406) 449-2406.

[REDACTED]

funding sources. From the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks' stream preservation fund, the task force will receive \$24,600 for pipeline and fencing. From ASCS, \$30,000 for cost-share practices will be made available. The landowners themselves will put in \$22,500 and a request for \$121,000 is being made to the legislature for Renewable Resources Development funds. The project will cost a total of \$188,100.

Carbon County's work is an example of how conservation districts can use 208 planning funds to develop water-quality improvement projects. Carbon County is fortunate to have an RC&D coordinator to manage its project efforts. Those districts not having this luxury could use the 208 funds to hire a coordinator for developing a project. The Bluewater Project is an even better example of how the districts, the ASCS and state agencies can pool their resources for maximum effect.

We wish Carbon County good luck in the legislature -- you have our support on this project. And we urge all other districts to follow Carbon County's example. If you need some help putting your ideas together for use of 208 funds in your district -- give the Water Quality Bureau a call. We'll help.

EASTERN SANDERS TRYING LANDOWNER-PARTICIPATION APPROACH

by Charles Wood
208 public participation coordinator

Like many conservation districts, Eastern Sanders has been tossing about in a sea of lost souls, trying somehow to heave them all a life-line in order to drag them into a useful water-quality program.

The district's concept of an "education" program was, "We'll hit our residents with a news release every two weeks and try to interest enough of them to attend some meetings that might get something started."

In other words, the district wanted to start big -- to blanket the entire district with words -- hoping against many odds that a specific water-quality project would arise.

This approach was questionable: First, once you've publicized your water-quality plan and the priority problems it identified, what is there to write news releases about? Second, what if the publicity only brings one percent of the district residents to meetings? (Experience is showing us that that's about the number that'll attend, at most.) Third, can that one percent really have any effect on water-quality problem areas? Can someone living in the extreme northwest part of the district -- who attended a meeting because he's interested in water quality -- really do anything to correct the problems on a creek in the extreme southeast part of the district? We doubt it.

Put away the shotgun, I advised. Shoulder, instead, a good rifle with a 'scope on it. Stop trying to hit the whole district all at once right now, it's inefficient. Try, instead, to hit one small but important water-quality problem area. And concentrate on hitting only those persons who can lick the problems there, probably the landowners. If they can do it, then you've got something to write news releases about.

Peter Krudde, the district's coordinator, agreed. And he showed me one small area -- a five-mile stretch of Hot Springs Creek -- where one rancher already was interested in implementing some practices that would correct the overgrazing that has ruined the stream's natural vegetation. The creek was high on the priority list of problem areas in the district, but that wasn't as important as the fact that there existed a way -- through an interested landowner -- to get a good public-participation program rolling.

"Get that man to contact his neighbors," I told Peter, "to see if those neighboring landowners will join him in his effort to improve the creek." Surely, I argued, they can see that uniting in a co-operative effort is much better than trying to go it alone. And certainly much better, for the sake of water-quality and the sake of good farm economics, than ignoring the Hot Springs Creek erosion problems altogether.

Krudde, a man of no little enthusiasm where conservation is concerned, immediately ran with the idea. The district plan has identified 42 specific water-quality problem sites. By picking rancher John Welch and five of his neighbors, Krudde could zero in on seven of those sites in one public-participation project. Krudde had a meeting with Welch. Welch agreed to help recruit his neighbors into a "Hot Springs Task Force" that would direct its own effort at cleaning up the creek.

Instead of sitting around writing vague news releases about nebulous BMPs, Krudde will put most of his time the next few months into helping Welch organize the task force. Once the landowners unite, then they take control of the Hot Springs project, making their own plans, obtaining their own funding. The district will continue to be an advisor, but it can turn its attention toward organizing landowners in another small problem area.

The key to such an approach is success. Once you achieve some sort of success in one problem area -- no matter how small -- it tends to encourage others to try it. Success is contagious. Ideally, the participation of six landowners in one small area would stimulate the participation of landowners in other areas until -- one by one -- they would cover the entire district.

But that's in the future. Peter Krudde must work on the one small area. Rancher Welch already wants to try fencing off some of his stream, to pipe water away from the stream so the cattle, too, will move away from the stream, to try better grazing rotation. And this is mostly for his own benefit: he'll have fewer calves falling into

the creek, stockwater and better access to more pasture area (not just the bottomland), and more stable streambanks, less bothersome silt and about six acres of good wildlife habitat. He now needs to convince the neighbors that it's also to their benefit to expand this effort along the creek, or at least to actively support his work.

As a "project," the united landowners can approach government agencies with one stronger voice in obtaining planning and implementation funds. And for his part, Peter Krudde has submitted "Organizing of a Hot Springs Creek Task Force" as a water-quality project eligible for 208 funds from the Water Quality Bureau.

DISTRICTS FACING TWO IMPORTANT DEADLINES

There are two very important dates that Montana conservation districts should know about:

February 1, 1981 and May 1, 1981

Those are the days by which proposals for Water Quality Management Assistance Funds (208 funds) should be submitted to the Water Quality Bureau. The bureau is allocating portions of its \$140,000 in 208 grant money to the districts on March 1, 1981, and June 1, 1981. The bureau staff would like to be able to look over the proposals at least a month before each allocation date.

Guidelines showing the format for applications and explaining how the money can be used already have been sent to each district. Basically, the money is to be used for studying water-quality problems, determining solutions and costs, and finding funding for implementation of solutions. It can pay for the hiring of private consultants or project coordinators.

CITIZENS' GROUP TO DIRECT PRICKLY PEAR PROJECT

An 11-member citizens' task force has taken the reins of a project to improve Prickly Pear Creek near Helena. The group, representing the diverse interests along the creek, held its first meeting in Helena Dec. 22.

They immediately jumped into the work of: (1) studying proposed water-rights legislation that could help smooth the way for one landowner's offer for a water exchange to increase instream flow; (2) finding abandoned reservoir sites and lagoons that may be used for future offstream storage to increase instream flow; (3) studying the federal requirement for liens on property on which minesites are re-claimed and starting a letter-writing campaign to oppose that provision;

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and (4) working with two conservation districts to come up with water-quality proposals that would benefit the creek.

Once the task force receives -- sometime this winter -- data from recent water and biological sampling runs and streambank inventory, it should have a clearer idea in what direction the project should go.

Clearly a good example of the concept that water-quality projects should be directed at a local, not a state or federal, level, the task force is made up of:

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| -- a member of a local sportsmen's association | -- an East Helena City councilman |
| -- a conservation district supervisor | -- a member of Trout Unlimited |
| -- two legislators who are also area ranchers | -- a member of the Prickly Pear Water Users Assn. |
| -- the environmental scientist for the Asarco smelter | -- an official of the Kaiser Cement corporation |
| -- the chief operator of Helena's sewage treatment plant | -- a member of the Jefferson County Planning Board |

EPA LEANS AWAY FROM FUNDING OF IMPLEMENTATION WORK

Montana and her neighbors may have a tougher go of it than states in the Midwest and East as far as water-quality programs are concerned.

That's the message from a November conference in Denver attended by Kit Walther, Statewide 208 coordinator, and Ken Chrest of the Water Quality Bureau. The conference was sponsored by the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Association of Conservation Districts.

Walther said the tone of the conference was oriented toward implementing 208 plans through non-federal funds instead of federal funding. Evidently, EPA sees a tighter grip on the federal piggybank in the next few years. "The Federal Rural Clean Water Program never received the funding that was originally intended," Walther said. "And then there's the new Congress . . . and the new President."

So conservation districts will have to implement their water-quality plans through such means as legislative appropriations, district-wide mill levies or existing state and federal cost-sharing plans -- if the conference's implications are borne out.

"We're going to have to rely on our own resources," Walther said.

He said EPA already is asking for a written 5-year strategy "to show how we're going to do it." The Montanans attending the conference complained that it would make things awfully tight. So did people from several other tight-budgeted Western states, including Colorado. "The mechanisms and strategies (for implementation) are in place in most of our region's states," Walther said, "but there just isn't much money."

Midwestern states with bigger populations, larger tax bases and higher cash-value crops are better off, Walther said. Missouri, for example, has a \$6-million cost-sharing program for water-quality. Nebraska also has a self-sustaining cost-share program.

Others attending from Montana were: Ole Ueland and Terry Wheeler of the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation; Joel Shouse of the Blue Ribbons 208 District, and Mark Spratt of the Flathead 208 District.

SHORT STORIES

HILL COUNTY WORKING UP WATER-QUALITY PROPOSAL

Hill County Conservation District is developing a water-quality improvement project on Beaver Creek south of Havre. The district is working to come up with a proposal for 208 planning funds before the first funds are allocated by the Water Quality Bureau on March 1.

The project will concentrate on a segment of Beaver Creek within Hill County's Beaver Creek Park. It will study grazing and riparian management as they affect sediment loads and high bacteria counts in the creek. The project should be culminating in recommendations on practices that would improve both the management and the stream within the park -- including the management of the beavers which give the creek its name but contribute some water-quality degradation.

TWO-COUNTY FORESTRY PROGRAM HAS BEGUN

A water-quality workshop and the hiring of a forester has marked the beginning of the two-county forestry program that has been in the works for several months.

The forester, Galynn Huber, has been hired to head up the program to control nonpoint-source pollution in Missoula and Mineral Counties. The program is set up under a contract between the Water Quality Bureau

and the Forestry Division of the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

WQB held a workshop on Dec. 18 for the new forester and the Forestry Division's Missoula staff. They will spend this winter planning the program and getting educational materials out to private land-owners, loggers and industry. Field work -- including reviews of timber-harvest operations on private land -- will begin in the spring.

LANDS DEPARTMENT DESIGNING WATER-QUALITY PROGRAM FOR MINES

The Department of State Lands (DSL) will design and implement a water-quality assessment program for all active hard-rock mines in Montana that have a potential for water pollution. The one-year program will begin as soon as the contract is signed by the Department of Health and Environmental Sciences (DHES) and DSL.

Under the program, DSL personnel will take water samples as part of their normal mine inspections. DSL will submit water samples to DHES, along with other information about mines' proximity to surface waters, but the names and actual locations of the sites will not be given to DHES. DHES, in turn, will analyze the data and "flag" those samples which show that water-quality problems may occur. At the end of the contract period, DSL will write a report summarizing the field findings and make recommendations for improving the problem sites that are identified.

DHES will train DSL staff on proper sampling procedures (one such workshop was held for DSL last April). And DSL will provide information to the mining industry concerning practices to avoid water contamination.



GUINDON

MINNEAPOLIS
TRIBUNE

"If the acid rain turns to acid snow, maybe the sidewalks will clear themselves this winter."

WQB PUTS HYDROLOGIST ON ITS STAFF

The Water Quality Bureau now has a hydrologist. Larry Brown, formerly with DNRC's Water Resources Division, will spend about half his time on instream-flow work, and the other half on technical support for water-quality projects. He joined the bureau in November.

Brown was graduated from Eastern Montana College in Billings, did graduate work at the University of Wyoming, worked with an oil company in Arizona, the U.S. Forest Service, the Wyoming Water Resources Research Institute, and was a successful farmer for three years. He joined DNRC in 1977.

AND ONE FINAL WORD

*Es ist leichter, den verschmutzten Fluss zu reinigen,
als vorher die Verschmutzung zu kontrollieren.**

* IT'S EASIER TO CLEAN THE RIVER THAN TO STOP THE POLLUTION

The West Germans have come up with an interesting way to combat nonpoint-source pollution in one of their rivers. The river is the Wanbach which flows into a reservoir that is the drinking-water supply for a half-million people. The river was carrying too many nutrients, mainly phosphorus, that came from a good many nonpoint-sources.

* Instead of using best management practices to halt the flow of nutrients into the river, the Germans decided it would be easier (and probably more cost effective) to build a treatment plant that would clean the river before it entered the reservoir.

So they did.

The Wanbach is about the size of Montana's Musselshell River at Roundup.



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TO:

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